

Media Note
Office of the Spokesman
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DHS To Require Digital Photos in Passports for Visa Waiver Travelers

Visa Waiver countries must provide plan to issue "e-passports" in 2006

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today announced that Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries will be required to produce passports with digital photographs by October 26, 2005. On that date, all VWP countries must also present an acceptable plan to issue passports with integrated circuit chips, or e-passports, within one year.

This announcement clarifies the implications of the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002 requirement that any passport issued after October 26, 2005, and used for Visa Waiver Program (VWP) travel to the United States must include a biometric identifier based on applicable standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and reflects the exercise of the authorities of the Secretary of Homeland Security to administer the VWP under Section 217 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

After extensive consultation with ICAO and Congress, DHS is requiring a digital photograph of the passport holder's face integrated into the data page of the passport by October 26, 2005. DHS will require VWP countries to produce passports using the integrated circuit chip, or e-passport, capable of storing the biographic information from the data page, a digitized photograph, and other biometric information, in travel documents by October 26, 2006. Valid passports issued by VWP countries before October 26, 2005, that do not contain a digital photograph will still be accepted for travel under the auspices of the VWP, provided that the passports are machine-readable.

The Department of State remains committed to the biometric passport as the safest possible travel document, and we will continue to work with the VWP countries on its development. The introduction of biometric or "e-passports" will further enhance global security by better ensuring that the person presenting a passport is the person to whom his/her government issued that passport.

In addition to the digital photo and chip requirements, DHS is taking steps to strengthen document integrity by requiring VWP countries to commit to several measures concerning lost and stolen passports. In particular, DHS will require VWP countries to report all lost and stolen passports to INTERPOL and DHS, to report all intercepted lost and stolen passports to DHS' Fraudulent Document Analysis Unit, to share information on trends and analysis of lost and stolen passports, and to provide detailed information on other VWP passport security features.

The 27 countries participating in the VWP include: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Effective June 26, 2005, any traveler from these 27 countries was required to be in possession of a machine-readable passport to enter the United States. Last year, approximately 15 million VWP travelers visited the United States.

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